

SOME QUESTIONS & ANSWERS BETWEEN T'ANG T'AI TSUNG & LI WEI-KUNG
BOOK I

The T'ai-tsung inquired: "Kao-li [Koguryo] has encroached on Hsin-lo [Silla] several times.¹ I dispatched an emissary to command them [to desist], but they have not accepted our edict. I am about to send forth a punitive expedition. How should we proceed?"

Li Ching replied: "According to what we have been able to find out about them, Kai Su-wen² relies upon his own knowledge in military affairs. He says that the Central States lack the capability to mount a punitive expedition and so contravenes your mandate. I request an army of thirty thousand men to capture him."

The T'ai-tsung said: "Your troops will be few while the place is distant. What strategy will you employ to approach them?"

Li Ching said: "I will use orthodox [*cheng*]³ troops."

The T'ai-tsung said: When you pacified the T'u-chüeh [Turks],⁴ you employed unorthodox [*ch'i*] troops. Now you speak about orthodox troops. How is that?"

Li Ching said: "When Chu-ko Liang⁵ captured Meng Hu seven times, it was not through any other Way [Tao]. He employed orthodox troops, that's all."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "When Ma Lung of the Chin dynasty⁶ conducted a punitive campaign against Liang-chou, it was also in accord with the 'Diagram of Eight Formations,'⁷ and he built narrow chariots.⁸ When the terrain was broad he employed encampments of 'deer-horn chariots,'⁹ and when the road was constricted he built wooden huts and placed them upon the chariots so they could both fight and advance. I believe it was orthodox troops which the ancients valued!"

Li Ching said: "When I conducted the punitive campaign against the T'u-chüeh, we traveled west for several thousand *li*. If they had not been orthodox troops, how could we have gone so far? Narrow chariots and deer-horn

chariots are essential to the army. They allow controlling the expenditure of energy,¹⁰ provide a defense to the fore,¹¹ and constrain the regiments and squads of five. These three are employed in turn. This is what Ma Lung learned so thoroughly from the ancients.”

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The T'ai-tsung said: “At the battle in which I destroyed Sung Lao-sheng, when the fronts clashed our righteous army retreated somewhat. I then personally led our elite cavalry¹² to race down from the Southern plain, cutting across in a sudden attack on them. After Lao-sheng's troops were cut off to the rear, we severely crushed them, and subsequently captured him. Were these orthodox troops? Or unorthodox troops?”

Li Ching replied: “Your majesty is a natural military genius, not one who learns by studying. I have examined the art of war as practiced from the Yellow Emperor on down. First be orthodox, and afterward unorthodox; first be benevolent and righteous, and afterward employ the balance of power [*ch'üan*] and craftiness. Moreover, in the battle at Huo-i the army was mobilized out of righteousness, so it was orthodox. When Chien-ch'eng¹³ fell off his horse and the Army of the Right withdrew somewhat, it was unorthodox.”

The T'ai-tsung said: “At that time our slight withdrawal almost defeated our great affair, so how can you refer to it as unorthodox?”

Li Ching replied: “In general, when troops advance to the front it is orthodox, when they [deliberately] retreat to the rear it is unorthodox. Moreover, if the Army of the Right had not withdrawn somewhat, how could you have gotten Lao-sheng to come forward? The *Art of War* states: “Display profits to entice them, create disorder [in their forces] and take them.”¹⁴ Lao-sheng did not know how to employ his troops. He relied on courage and made a hasty advance. He did not anticipate his rear being severed nor being captured by your Majesty. This is what is referred to as ‘using the unorthodox as the orthodox.’”

The T'ai-tsung said: “As for Huo Ch'ü-ping's¹⁵ tactics unintentionally cohering with those of Sun-tzu and Wu-tzu, was it really so? When our Army of the Right withdrew, [my father, Emperor] Kao-tsu, turned pale. But then I attacked vigorously and, on the contrary, it became advantageous for us. This unknowingly cohered with Sun-tzu and Wu-tzu. My lord certainly knows their words.”

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Whenever an army withdraws can it be termed unorthodox?"

Li Ching said: "It is not so. Whenever the soldiers retreat with their flags confused and disordered, the sounds of the large and small drums not responding to each other, and their orders shouted out in a clamor, this is true defeat, not unorthodox strategy. If the flags are ordered, the drums respond to each other, and the commands and orders seem unified, then even though they may be retreating and running, it is not a defeat and must be a case of unorthodox strategy. The *Art of War* says: 'Do not pursue feigned retreats.'¹⁶ It also says: 'Although capable display incapability.'¹⁷ These all refer to the unorthodox."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "At the battle of Huo-i, when the Army of the Right withdrew somewhat, was this a question of Heaven? When Lao-sheng was captured, was this due to the efforts of man?"

Li Ching said: "If the orthodox troops had not changed to unorthodox, and the unorthodox to orthodox, how would you have gained the victory? Thus for one who excels at employing the army, unorthodox and orthodox lie with man, that is all! He changes them in spirit-like fashion, [which is] the reason they are attributed to Heaven."

The T'ai-tsung nodded his head.

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Are the orthodox and unorthodox distinguished beforehand, or are they determined at the time of battle?"

Li Ching said: "According to Duke Ts'ao's *Hsin shu* [*New Book*],¹⁸ 'If you outnumber the enemy two to one, then divide your troops into two, with one section being orthodox, and one section being unorthodox. If you outnumber the enemy five to one, then three sections should be orthodox and two sections unorthodox.'¹⁹ This states the main point. As Sun-tzu said: 'In warfare the strategic configurations of power do not exceed the unorthodox and orthodox, but the changes of the unorthodox and orthodox cannot be completely exhausted! The unorthodox and orthodox mutually produce each other, just like an endless cycle. Who can exhaust them?'²⁰ This captures it. So how can a distinction be made beforehand?

"If the officers and troops are not yet trained in my methods, if the assistant generals are not yet familiar with my orders, then we must break [the training] into two sections. When teaching battle tactics, in each case the sol-

diers must recognize the flags and drums, dividing and combining in turn. Thus [Sun-tzu] said: 'Dividing and combining are changes.'²¹

"These are the techniques for teaching warfare. When the instructions and the evaluation [of their implementation] have been completed and the masses know my methods, only then can they be raced about like a flock of sheep, following wherever the general points.²² Who then makes a distinction of unorthodox and orthodox? What Sun-tzu refers to as 'giving shape to others but being formless ourselves'²³ is the pinnacle in employing the unorthodox and orthodox. Therefore, such a distinction beforehand is [merely for the purpose] of instruction. Determining the changes at the moment of battle, [the changes] are inexhaustible."

The T'ai-tsung said: "Profound indeed! Duke Ts'ao must have known it. But what the *Hsin shu* teaches is only what he [conveyed] to his generals, not the fundamental method of the unorthodox and the orthodox."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Duke Ts'ao states, 'Unorthodox troops attack from the flank.' My lord, what do you have to say about this?"

Li Ching replied: "I recall that, in commenting on *Sun-tzu*, Duke Ts'ao said: 'Going out first to engage in battle is orthodox; going out afterward is unorthodox.' This is different from his discussions about flank attacks. I humbly refer to the engagement of great masses as orthodox, and those which the general himself sends forth as unorthodox. Where is the restriction of first, or later, or flank attack?"

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The T'ai-tsung said: "If I cause the enemy to perceive my orthodox as unorthodox, and cause him to perceive my unorthodox as orthodox, is this what is meant by 'displaying a form to others?' Is employing the unorthodox as orthodox, the orthodox as unorthodox, unfathomable changes and transformation, what is meant by 'being formless?'"

Li Ching bowed twice and said: "Your Majesty is a spiritual Sage. You go back to the ancients, beyond what I can attain."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "If 'dividing and combining are changes,' wherein lie the unorthodox and orthodox?"

Li Ching said: "For those who excel at employing troops there are none that are not orthodox, none that are not unorthodox, so they cause the en-

emy never to be able to fathom them. Thus with the orthodox they are victorious, with the unorthodox they are also victorious. The officers of the Three Armies only know the victory; none know how it is attained.²⁴ Without being able to fully comprehend the changes, how could [the outstanding generals] attain this? As for where the dividing and combining come from, only Sun-tzu was capable [of comprehending it]. From Wu Ch'i on, no one has been able to attain it."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "What was Wu Ch'i's strategy like?"

Li Ching said: "Permit me to speak about the general points. Marquis Wu of Wei asked Wu Ch'i about [the strategy to be employed] when two armies confront each other. Wu Ch'i said: 'Have some of your low-ranking, courageous soldiers go forward and attack. When the fronts first clash, have them flee. When they flee, do not punish them, but observe whether the enemy advances to take [the bait]. If they sit as one and arise as one, and do not pursue your fleeing troops, the enemy has good strategists. If all their troops pursue the fleeing forces, some advancing, some halting, in disordered fashion, the enemy is not talented. Attack them without hesitation.'²⁵ I think that Wu Ch'i's strategy is generally of this sort, not what Sun-tzu would refer to as 'an orthodox engagement.'

The T'ai-tsung said: "My lord, your uncle Han Ch'in-hu once said you could discuss Sun-tzu and Wu-tzu with him.²⁶ Was he also referring to the unorthodox and orthodox?"

Li Ching said: "How could Ch'in-hu know about the pinnacle of the unorthodox and orthodox? He only took the unorthodox as unorthodox, and the orthodox as orthodox! He never knew about the 'mutual changes of the unorthodox and orthodox into each other, the inexhaustible cycle.'²⁷

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The T'ai-tsung said: "When the ancients approached enemy formations and then sent forth unorthodox troops to attack where unexpected, were they also using the method of 'mutual changes?'"

Li Ching said: "In earlier ages most battles were a question of minimal tactics conquering those without any tactics, of some minor degree of excellence conquering those without any capabilities. How can they merit being discussed as the art of war? An example is Hsieh Hsüan's destruction of Fu Chien. It was not [because of] Hsieh Hsüan's excellence but probably Fu Chien's incompetence."²⁸

The T'ai-tsung ordered the attending officers to find Hsieh Hsüan's biography in the histories and report on it. After hearing the report he said: "Fu Chien's management of this affair was really not good."

Li Ching said: "I observe that Fu Chien's biography records that 'Ch'in's armies had all been broken and defeated, with only Mu-jung Ch'ui's single force still intact. Fu Chien [the Ch'in king], leading more than a thousand cavalry, raced over to join him. Ch'ui's son Pao advised Ch'ui to kill Fu Chien but without result.' From this one sees that when the Ch'in armies were in turbulence, only Mu-jung Ch'ui's force remained intact, so it is obvious that Fu Chien was probably betrayed by Ch'ui's [treachery]. Now to be betrayed by others yet still hope to conquer the enemy, is it not difficult? Thus I say that men such as Fu Chien lacked tactics."

The T'ai-tsung said: "Sun-tzu said that 'one who plans extensively will conquer one who does less planning,'²⁹ so thus we know some planning will conquer no planning. All affairs are thus."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "The Yellow Emperor's *Art of War*³⁰ has been transmitted by previous generations as *The Classic of Grasping the Unorthodox* and as *The Classic of Grasping Subtle Change*. What do you have to say about this?"

Li Ching said: "The pronunciation of the character 'unorthodox'³¹ is the same as that for 'subtle change.'³² Thus some have transmitted [the title] as the latter, but the meaning is the same. If we investigate the actual writing it says: 'Four are orthodox, four are unorthodox. The remaining forces³³ are for "grasping subtle change."' Here [the character] 'unorthodox' is 'excess.' Because of this it is pronounced '*chi*.' My foolish opinion is that there is nothing which is not subtle, so why stress 'grasping' in speaking about it? It ought to be the remainder, then it would be correct.

"Now orthodox troops receive their [mission] from the ruler, while unorthodox troops are ordered forth by the general. Sun-tzu said: 'If orders are consistently implemented so as to instruct the people, then the people will submit.'³⁴ These are what are received from the ruler. Moreover, he says: 'The [employment of] the troops cannot be spoken of beforehand'³⁵ and 'there are commands from the ruler which are not accepted.'³⁶ These are what the general himself issues.

"As for generals: If they employ orthodox tactics without any unorthodox ones, they are defensive generals. If they employ unorthodox tactics without any orthodox ones, they are aggressive generals. If they employ both, they are generals to preserve the state. Thus 'grasping subtle change' and 'grasp-

ing the unorthodox' are not fundamentally two methods. Students [of military strategy] thoroughly understand them both!"

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The T'ai-tsung said: "[The *Classic of Grasping Subtle Change* states:] 'The number of formations is nine, with the center having the excess which the commanding general controls.'³⁷ The "four sides" and "eight directions" are all regulated therein. Within the [main] formation, formations are contained; within the platoons,³⁸ platoons are contained. They [can] take the front to be the rear, the rear to be the front.³⁹ When advancing, they do not run quickly; when withdrawing, they do not race off. There are four heads, eight tails.⁴⁰ Wherever they are struck is made the head. If the enemy attacks the middle, the [adjoining] two heads will both come to the rescue. The numbers begin with five and end with eight."⁴¹ What does all this mean?"

Li Ching said: "Chu-ko Liang set stones out horizontally and vertically to make eight rows. The method for the square formation then is this plan. When I instructed the army, we invariably began with this formation. What generations have passed down as *The Classic of Grasping Subtle Change* probably includes its rough outline."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Heaven, Earth, wind, clouds, dragons, tigers, birds, and snakes—what is the meaning of these eight formations?"

Li Ching said: "There was an error made by those who transmitted them. The ancients secretly concealed these methods, so they craftily created these eight names. The eight formations were originally one, being then divided into eight. For example, 'Heaven' and 'Earth' originated in flag designations; 'wind' and 'clouds' originated in pennant names. 'Dragons,' 'tigers,' 'birds,' and 'snakes' originated in the distinctions of the platoons and squads. Later generations erroneously transmitted them. If they were cleverly creating formations in the image of animals, why would they just stop at eight?"

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The T'ai-tsung said: "The numbers begin with five and end with eight, so if they were not set up as images, then they are really ancient formations. Would you please explain them for me?"

Li Ching said: "I observe that the Yellow Emperor governed the army according to the methods by which he first established the 'village and well' system.⁴² Thus the 'well' was divided by four roads, and eight families occupied it. Its shape was that for the Chinese character for 'well' [see Figure 1],

so nine squares were opened therein. Five were used for formations, four were empty.⁴³ This is what is meant by 'the numbers beginning with five.'

"The middle was left vacant to be occupied by the commanding general, while around the four sides the various companies were interconnected, so this is what is meant by 'ending with eight.'

"As for the changes and transformations to control the enemy: Intermixed and turbulent, their fighting [appeared] chaotic, but their method was not disordered. Nebulous and varying, their deployment was circular, but their strategic power [*shih*] was not dispersed.⁴⁴ This is what is meant by 'they disperse and become eight, reunite and again become one.'"

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The T'ai-tsung said: "The Yellow Emperor's governance of the army was profound indeed! Even if later generations have men with the wisdom of Heaven and spirit-like planning ability, none will be able to exceed his scope! After this who came near to him?"

Li Ching said: "When the Chou dynasty first flourished, the T'ai Kung substantially copied his methods. He began at the Ch'i state capital by establishing the well-acreage⁴⁵ system, [constructing] three hundred chariots, and [training] three hundred Tiger Guards⁴⁶ in order to establish a military organization. [They practiced advancing] 'six paces, seven paces,' [making] 'six attacks, seven attacks,'⁴⁷ so as to teach them battle tactics. When he deployed the army at Mu-yeh, with [only] a hundred officers the T'ai Kung controlled the army⁴⁸ and established his military achievements. With forty-five thousand men he conquered King Chou's mass of seven hundred thousand.

"In the Chou dynasty the *Ssu-ma Fa* was based upon the T'ai Kung. When the T'ai Kung died the people of Ch'i obtained his bequeathed strategies. When Duke Huan became hegemon over All under Heaven, he relied on Kuan Chung⁴⁹ who again cultivated the T'ai Kung's methods. Their army was referred to as a 'restrained and governed force,' and all the feudal lords submitted."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "The Confucians mostly say that Kuan Chung was merely the minister of a hegemon [rather than a true king], so they truly do not know that his military methods were founded upon a king's regulations. Chu-ko Liang had the talent of a king's supporter, and he compared himself with Kuan Chung and Yüeh I. From this we know that Kuan Chung was also



Figure 1 Chinese character for “well”

the true sustainer of a king. But when the Chou declined the king could not use him, so he borrowed the state of Ch'i and mobilized an army there.”

Li Ching bowed twice and said: “Your Majesty is a spiritual Sage! Since you understand men this well, even if your old minister should die, he would not be ashamed before any of the great Worthies of antiquity.

“I would like to speak about Kuan Chung’s methods for organizing the state of Ch’i. He divided Ch’i to compose three armies. Five families comprised the fundamental unit, so five men made up a squad of five. Ten fundamental family units composed a hamlet, so fifty men composed a platoon. Four hamlets constituted a village, so two hundred men composed a company. Ten villages constituted a town, so two thousand men formed a battalion. Five towns made up an army, so ten thousand men composed one army. It all proceeded from the *Ssu-ma Fa*’s meaning that one army consists of five battalions, while one battalion consists of five companies.⁵⁰ In actuality, these are all the bequeathed methods of the T’ai Kung.”

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The T’ai-tsung said: “People say the *Ssu-ma Fa* was composed by Jang-chü. Is this true or not?”

Li Ching said: “According to the ‘Biography of Jang-chü’ in the *Shih chi*, he excelled in commanding the army at the time of Duke Ching of Ch’i, defeating the forces of Yen and Chin. Duke Ching honored him with the post of Commander of the Horse [*Ssu-ma*], and from then on he was called *Ssu-ma Jang-chü*. His sons and grandsons were then surnamed *Ssu-ma*. In the

time of King Wei of Ch'i they sought out and talked about the methods of the ancient Commanders of the Horse [*ssu-ma*] and also narrated what Jang-chü had studied. This subsequently became a book in ten chapters called *Ssu-ma Jang-chü*. Moreover, what has been transmitted from the military strategists and remains today is divided into four categories: 'balance of power and plans,' 'disposition and strategic power,' 'yin and yang,' and 'techniques and crafts.' They all come out of the *Ssu-ma Fa*.⁵¹

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The T'ai-tsung said: "During the Han, Chang Liang and Han Hsin ordered [the books on] military arts. Altogether there were one hundred and eighty-two thinkers, but after they collated and edited them to select the important ones, they settled on thirty-five. Now we have lost what they transmitted. What about this?"

Li Ching said: "What Chang Liang studied was *The Six Secret Teachings* and *The Three Strategies* of the T'ai Kung. What Han Hsin studied was the *Ssu-ma Jang-chü* and the *Sun-tzu*. But the main principles do not go beyond the Three Gates and Four Types, that is all!"

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The T'ai-tsung said: "What is meant by the Three Gates?"

Li Ching said: "I find that in the eighty-one chapters of the *Plans of the T'ai Kung*, what is termed 'secret strategy' cannot be exhausted in words; the seventy-one chapters of the *Sayings of the T'ai Kung* cannot be exhausted in warfare; and the eighty-five chapters of the *Warfare of the T'ai Kung* cannot be exhausted in resources. These are the Three Gates."⁵²

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The T'ai-tsung said: "What is meant by the Four Types?"

Li Ching said: "These are what Jen Hung discussed during the Han. As for the classes of military strategists, 'balance of power and plans' comprises one type, 'disposition and strategic power' is one type, and 'yin and yang' and 'techniques and crafts' are two types. These are the Four Types."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "The *Ssu-ma Fa* begins with the spring and winter ceremonial hunts.⁵³ Why?"

Li Ching said: "To accord with the seasons, secure the connections with the spirits, and stress their substance. They were the most important government affairs according to the *Chou li* [*Rites of Chou*]. King Ch'eng held the spring hunt on the southern side of Mount Ch'i. King K'ang held the assem-

bly at Feng Palace. King Mu held the assembly at Mount T'u. These are the affairs of the Son of Heaven.

"When Chou rule declined, Duke Huan of Ch'i assembled the armies [of the feudal states] at Chao-ling, while Duke Wen of Chin made his alliance [with the feudal lords] at Ch'ien-t'u. In these cases feudal lords respectfully performed the affairs of the Son of Heaven.⁵⁴ In actuality they used the Law for Nine Attacks⁵⁵ to overawe the irreverent. They employed the pretext of the hunt to hold court assemblies, accordingly conducting tours and hunts among the feudal lords, instructing them in armor and weapons.⁵⁶ The [*Ssu-ma Fa* also] states that unless there is a national emergency, the army should not be wantonly mobilized, but that during the times between the agricultural seasons they should certainly not forget military preparations.⁵⁷ Thus is it not profound that it placed the hunts of spring and winter at the beginning?"

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The T'ai-tsung said: "During the Spring and Autumn period, the 'Methods for the Double Battalion of King Chuang of Ch'u'⁵⁸ stated that 'the hundred officers should act in accord with the symbolization of things, military administration should be prepared without official instructions.'⁵⁹ Did this accord with Chou regulations?"

Li Ching said: "According to the *Tso chuan*, 'King Chuang's chariot battalions [*kuang*] consisted of thirty chariots per battalion. [Each chariot] in the battalion had a company [*tsu*] of infantrymen plus a platoon [*liang*] for the flanks.'⁶⁰ 'When the army was advancing [the ones] on the right deployed by the shafts.'⁶¹ They took the shafts as their defining measure. Thus they stayed close to the shafts to fight.⁶² These were all Chou regulations.

"[In the case of Ch'u] I refer to one hundred men as a company [*tsu*], while fifty men are called a platoon [*liang*]. Thus each chariot is accompanied by one hundred and fifty men, many more than in the Chou organization. Under the Chou each chariot was accompanied by seventy-two infantrymen and three armored officers. Twenty-five men, including an officer, formed one platoon [*liang*], so three Chou platoons were seventy-five men altogether. Ch'i is a country of mountains and marshes; chariots were few, men numerous. If they were to be divided into three platoons [*tui*],⁶³ then they would be [functionally] the same as the Chou."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "During the Spring and Autumn period, when Hsün Wu attacked the Ti, he abandoned his chariots to make infantry lines.⁶⁴ Were they also orthodox troops? Or unorthodox troops?"

Li Ching said: "Hsün Wu used strategy for chariot warfare, that is all! Although he abandoned the chariots, his strategy is still found therein. One force acted as the left flank, one force acted as the right flank, and one resisted the enemy in the front. Dividing them into three units, this is one tactic for chariot warfare. Whether one thousand or ten thousand chariots, it would be the same. I observe that in Duke Ts'ao's *Hsin shu* it states: 'Attack chariots [are accompanied by] seventy-five men. To the fore, to oppose the enemy, is one unit; to the left and right corners are two more units. The defense chariots⁶⁵ have an additional unit. It consists of ten men to prepare the food, five to repair and maintain the equipment, five to care for the horses, and five to gather firewood and fetch water—altogether twenty-five men. For a pair of attack and defense chariots, altogether there are one hundred men.' If you mobilize one hundred thousand men, you would employ one thousand each of the light [attack] and heavy [defense] chariots. This is the general outline of Hsün Wu's old methods.

"Moreover, I observe that in the period from Han to Wei, army regulations had five chariots compose a platoon [*tui*], with a supervisor [to command them]. Ten chariots formed a regiment [*shih*],⁶⁶ under a chief commandant. For one thousand chariots there were two men, a general and lieutenant general. If more chariots, the organization followed this pattern. If I examine it in comparison with our present methods, then our probing force is the [old] cavalry; our frontal assault troops are the [old] infantry and cavalry, half and half; and our holding force goes forth with combined chariot tactics.

"When I went to the west to rectify and punish the T'u-chüeh, we crossed several thousand *li* of treacherous terrain. I never dared change this system, for the constraints and regulations of the ancients can truly be trusted."

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The T'ai-tsung honored Ling-chou with an imperial visit. After he returned he summoned Li Ching and invited him to be seated. He said: "I ordered Tao-tsung, A-shih-na She-erh, and others to mount a campaign of rectification and punishment against Hsüeh-Yen-t'o. Several groups among the T'ieh-le peoples requested the establishment of Han bureaucratic administration, and I acceded to all their requests. The Yen-t'o fled to the west, but I was afraid they would become a source of trouble to us, so I dispatched Li Chi to attack them. At present the northern regions are all at peace, but the various groups of barbarians and Han Chinese dwell intermingled with one another. What long-term method can we employ to settle and preserve them both?"

Li Ching said: "Your Majesty has ordered the establishment of sixty-six relay stations from the T'u-chüeh to the Hui-ho [Uighers] to connect the forward observation posts. This step already implements the necessary measures. However, I foolishly believe it is appropriate for the Han [defensive] forces to have one method of training and the barbarians another. Since their instruction and training are separate, do not allow them to be intermixed and treated the same. If we encounter the incursion of some other group, then at that moment you can secretly order the generals to change their insignia and exchange their uniforms, and employ unorthodox methods to attack them."

The T'ai-tsung said: "For what reason?"

Li Ching said: "This is the technique referred to as 'manifesting many methods to cause misperception.'⁶⁷ If you have the barbarians appear as Han Chinese, and Han Chinese masquerade as barbarians, the [enemy] will not know the distinction between barbarians and Chinese. Then no one will be able to fathom our plans for attack and defense. One who excels at employing an army first strives not to be fathomable,⁶⁸ for then the enemy will be confused wherever he goes."

The T'ai-tsung said: "This truly accords with my thoughts. You may go and secretly instruct our border generals that only through this difference between Han and barbarians can we manifest the methods of unorthodox and orthodox warfare."

Li Ching bowed twice and said: "Your thoughts are those of a Sage, they flow from Heaven! You hear one and you know ten. How can I fully explain it all!"

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Chu-ko Liang said: 'A well-organized army, [even] if commanded by an incompetent general, cannot be defeated. An army that lacks good order, [even if it] has a capable general, cannot be victorious.' I suspect that his discussion is not expressive of the highest principles."

Li Ching said: "This was something Marquis Wu [Chu-ko Liang] said to stimulate⁶⁹ the troops. I observe that Sun-tzu said: 'If the instructions and training are not enlightened, the officers and troops lack constant duties, and their deployment into formation is askew, it is termed chaotic.'⁷⁰ From antiquity the number of cases in which a chaotic army brought victory [to the enemy] can never be fully recorded!'⁷¹ As to 'the instructions and leadership'⁷² not being enlightened,' he was speaking about their instruction and inspection lacking the ancient methods. With regard to 'the officers and troops lacking constant duties,' he was speaking about the generals and their subor-

dinates entrusted with authority [*ch'üan*] not having held their positions very long. When he refers to 'a chaotic army inviting victory,' he was speaking about self-destruction and defeat, not about an enemy conquering them. For this reason Marquis Wu said that if the army is well organized and trained, even an ordinary general will not be defeated. If the troops themselves are in chaos, then even though the general is sagacious, they will be endangered. What doubt can there be?"

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The T'ai-tsung said: "The instruction and training of the army truly cannot be slighted!"

Li Ching said: "When the training accords with method, then the officers take pleasure in being employed. When instructions do not accord with method, even though one supervises and upbraids them from morning to night, it is of no advantage. The reason I thoroughly investigated the ancient regulations and collated them with all diagrams was to realize as nearly as possible a well-regulated army."

The T'ai-tsung said: "Please select the ancient methods for formations on my behalf and diagram them all for me."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Barbarian armies only rely on their strong horses to rush forth to attack. Are they unorthodox forces? Han armies only rely on their strong crossbowmen to hamstring the enemy. Are they orthodox forces?"

Li Ching said: "According to Sun-tzu: 'Those that excel in employing the army seek [victory] through the strategic configuration of power [*shih*], not through relying upon men. Therefore they are able to select men for positions and employ strategic power.'⁷³ What is referred to as 'selecting men' means engaging in battle in accord with the respective strengths of the barbarians and the Han. The barbarians are strong in the use of horses. Horses are an advantage in fast-moving fighting. Han troops are strong in the use of crossbows. Crossbows are an advantage in a slow-paced battle. In this each of them naturally relies upon their strategic power [*shih*], but they are not to be distinguished as unorthodox and orthodox. Previously, I discussed how the barbarians and Han units ought to change their insignia and exchange their uniforms, a technique in which the unorthodox and orthodox mutually give rise to each other. Horses also have orthodox tactics, crossbows also unorthodox employment. What constancy is there?"

The T'ai-tsung said: "My lord, discuss the technique again in detail."

Li Ching said: "First manifest a form and cause the enemy to follow it. This is the technique."

[T'ai-tsung:⁷⁴ "I understand it now. Sun-tzu said: 'For the army, the pinnacle of military deployment approaches the formless.' And 'In accord with the enemy's disposition we impose measures upon the masses that produce victory, but the masses are unable to fathom them.'⁷⁵ This is what is meant!"

Li Ching bowed twice. "Perfect indeed! Your Majesty's sagacious thoughts have already penetrated more than half of it!"]

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Recently, the remnants of the Ch'i-tan [Khitan] and Hsi peoples have all submitted. I have determined that the two [tribal] commanders in chief of the Sung Mo and Jao Le regions will be united under the An-pei Protectorate. I would like to employ Hsüeh Wan-ch'e [as governor]. What do you think?"

Li Ching said: "Wan-ch'e is not as suitable as A-shih-na She-erh, Chih-shih Ssu-li, or Ch'i-pi Ho-li. They are all barbarian subjects who thoroughly understand military affairs. I once spoke with them about the mountains, rivers, and roads of the Sung Mo and Jao Le regions, as well as the submissive and rebellious barbarians as far out as the western regions where there are tens of peoples. In every detail they can be trusted. I taught them methods of deployment, and in all cases they nodded their heads and accepted my instructions. I hope you will entrust them with the responsibility without having any doubt. [Men] like Wan-ch'e are courageous but lack planning and would find it difficult to bear the responsibility alone."

The T'ai-tsung smiled and said: "These barbarians have all been well employed by you. The ancients said: 'Using the Man and Ti to attack the Man and Ti is China's strategic power.'⁷⁶ My lord has attained it."

BOOK II

The T'ai-tsung said: "I have looked through all the military books, but none surpasses Sun-tzu. In Sun-tzu's thirteen chapters there is nothing that surpasses the 'vacuous' and 'substantial.'⁷⁷ Now when employing the army, if one recognizes the strategic power [*shih*] of the vacuous and substantial, then he will always be victorious. Our contemporary generals are only able to talk about avoiding the substantial and attacking the vacuous. When they approach the enemy, few recognize the vacuous and substantial, probably because they are unable to compel the enemy [to come] to them, but on the contrary are compelled by the enemy. How can this be? My lord, please discuss the essentials of all these in detail with our generals."

Li Ching said: "Instructing them first about the techniques for changing the unorthodox [*ch'i*] and orthodox [*cheng*] into each other and afterward telling them about the form [*hsing*] of the vacuous and substantial would be possible. Many of the generals do not know how to take the unorthodox to be the orthodox, and the orthodox to be the unorthodox, so how can they recognize when the vacuous is substantial, and the substantial vacuous?"

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The T'ai-tsung said: "[According to Sun-tzu:] 'Make plans against them to know the likelihood for gain and loss.'⁷⁸ Stimulate them to know their patterns of movement and stopping. Determine their disposition [*hsing*] to know what terrain is tenable, what deadly. Probe them to know where they have an excess, where an insufficiency.'⁷⁹ Accordingly, do the unorthodox and orthodox lie with me, while the vacuous and substantial lie with the enemy?"

Li Ching said: "The unorthodox and orthodox are the means by which to bring about the vacuous and substantial in the enemy. If the enemy is substantial, then I must use the orthodox. If the enemy is vacuous, then I must use the unorthodox. If a general does not know the unorthodox and ortho-

dox, then even though he knows whether the enemy is vacuous or substantial, how can he bring it about?⁸⁰ I respectfully accept your mandate but will [first] instruct all the generals in the unorthodox and orthodox, and afterward they will realize the vacuous and substantial by themselves.”

The T'ai-tsung said: “If we take the unorthodox as the orthodox and the enemy realizes it is the unorthodox, then I will use the orthodox to attack him. If we take the orthodox as the unorthodox and the enemy thinks it is the orthodox, then I will use the unorthodox to attack him. I will cause the enemy's strategic power [*shih*] to constantly be vacuous, and my strategic power to always be substantial. If you teach the generals these methods, it should be easy to make them understand.”

Li Ching said: “One thousand essays, ten thousand sections do not go beyond ‘compel others, do not be compelled by them.’⁸¹ I ought to use this to teach all the generals.”

The T'ai-tsung said: “I have established the Yao-ch'ih Supervisor in Chief subordinate to the An-hsi Protector-general. How shall we manage and deploy the Han [Chinese] and barbarian peoples in this area?”

Li Ching said: “When Heaven gave birth to men, originally there was no distinction of ‘barbarian’ and ‘Han.’ But their territory is distant, wild, and desert-like, and they must rely on archery and hunting to live. Thus they are constantly practicing fighting and warfare. If we are generous to them, show good faith, pacify them, and fully supply them with clothes and food, then they will all be men of the Han. As your Majesty has established this Protector-general, I request you gather in all the Han border troops and settle them in the interior. This will greatly reduce the provisions necessary to feed them, which is what military strategists refer to as the ‘method for governing strength.’ But you should select Han officials who are thoroughly familiar with barbarian affairs, and you should disperse defensive fortifications [throughout the region]. This will be sufficient to manage the region for a long time. If we should encounter some emergency, Han troops can then go out there.”

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The T'ai-tsung said: “What did Sun-tzu say about governing strength?”

Li Ching said: “‘With the near await the distant; with the rested await the fatigued; with the sated await the hungry.’⁸² This covers the main points. One who excels at employing the army extends these three into six: ‘With enticements await their coming. In quiescence await the impetuous. With the heavy await the light. With the strictly [disciplined] await the inattentive.

With order await the turbulent. With defense await attacks.’⁸³ When conditions are contrary to these, your strength will be insufficient. Without techniques to govern [the expenditure of force], how can one direct the army?”

The T’ai-tsung said: “People who study Sun-tzu today only recite the empty words. Few grasp and extend his meaning. Methods for governing the expenditure of strength should be thoroughly expounded to all the generals.”

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The T’ai-tsung said: “Our old generals and aging troops are exhausted and nearly all dead. Our armies are newly deployed, so they have no experience in assuming formations against the enemy. If we want to instruct them, what should be most essential?”

Li Ching said: “I would instruct the soldiers by dividing their activities into three steps. [The men] must first be organized into squads according to the Method of Five. After this organization into squads of five is complete, provide them with [military organization] into armies and brigades.⁸⁴ This is one step.

“The method for military organization into armies and brigades is to build from one to ten, from ten to one hundred.⁸⁵ This is one step.

“Entrust them to the command of subordinate generals. The subordinate generals will unite all the platoons of a brigade. Assemble and instruct them with the diagrams for the dispositions. This is one step.

“The commanding general examines the instructions in each of these three steps and thereupon conducts maneuvers to test and evaluate their deployment into formation and their overall organization. He divides them into unorthodox [*ch’i*] and orthodox [*cheng*], binds the masses with an oath, and implements punishments. Your Majesty should observe them from on high, and all measures should be possible.”

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The T’ai-tsung said: “There are several schools of thought on the Method of Five. Whose is the most important?”

Li Ching said: “According to *Master Tso’s Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*: ‘First the battalion [of chariots], afterward the squads of five [in the gaps].’⁸⁶ Moreover, the *Ssu-ma Fa* states: ‘Five men make up the squad of five.’⁸⁷ The *Wei Liao-t’zu* has [a section entitled] ‘Orders for Binding the Squads of Five.’⁸⁸ Han military organization had the one-foot [wooden strip] for records and insignia [for the squads].⁸⁹ In later ages the

records and insignia were done on paper, whereupon they lost the organization.

"I have studied and contemplated their methods. From the squad of five men they changed to twenty-five. From twenty-five men they change to seventy-five, composed of seventy-two infantrymen and three armored officers. When they set aside chariots and employed cavalry, then twenty-five [infantry] men were equivalent to eight cavalrymen.⁹⁰ This then was the organization of 'five soldiers matching five.'⁹¹ Thus among the military methods of the various strategists, only the Method of Five is important. In the minimal arrangement there are five men, in the largest twenty-five. If the latter are tripled, they become seventy-five. Multiplied by another level of five, one obtains three hundred and seventy-five. Three hundred men are orthodox forces, sixty are unorthodox [with the remaining fifteen being the armored *shih*]. In this case they can be further divided into two, forming two orthodox [companies] of one hundred and fifty men each, and two [unorthodox] platoons of thirty men, one for each flank. This is what the *Ssu-ma Fa* means by 'five men composing the unit of five, with ten squads of five being a platoon,' which is relied upon until today. This is its essence."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "I have discussed military strategy with Li Chi. For the most part he agrees with what you say, but Li Chi does not thoroughly understand its origin. From what techniques did the methods by which you established the 'Six Flowers Formation' originate?"

Li Ching said: "I based them on Chu-ko Liang's Eight Formations. Large formations contain small formations; large encampments contain small encampments.⁹² All the corners are interlocked, the curves and broken points correlated. The ancient system was like this, so I made the diagram in accord with it. Thus the outside is drawn to be square, but the inside environment is circular. They then become the 'Six Flowers,' as commonly termed."

The T'ai-tsung said: "What do you mean by 'the outside is square and the inside circular?'"

Li Ching said: "The square is given birth from the pace,⁹³ the circle is given birth from the odd. The square provides the means to keep the paces straight, the circle the means to continue their turning. For this reason the number of paces is settled by the Earth, while the demarcation of the circular responds to Heaven. When the paces are settled and the circle complete, then the army's changes will not be disordered. The Eight Formations can become the Six Flowers. This is Chu-ko Liang's old method."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "By drawing the square one can evaluate the paces; by setting the circle one can evaluate the weapons. From the paces one can instruct them in 'foot' techniques; with the weapons one can instruct them in hand techniques. This is advantageous to training the hands and feet and certainly seems correct."

Li Ching said: "Wu Ch'i states: 'Although on desperate ground, they cannot be separated; even if in retreat they will not scatter.'⁹⁴ This is the method of paces. Instructing the soldiers is like placing chessmen on a board. If there were no lines to demark the paths, how could one use the chess pieces? Sun-tzu said: 'Terrain gives birth to measurement; measurement produces the estimation [of forces]. Estimation [of forces] gives rise to calculating [the numbers of men]. Calculating [the numbers of men] gives rise to weighing [strength]. Weighing [strength] gives birth to victory. Thus the victorious army is like a ton compared with an ounce, while the defeated army is like an ounce weighed against a ton!'⁹⁵ It all commences with measuring out the square and circle."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Sun-tzu's words are profound indeed! If one does not determine the terrain as near or distant, the shape of the land as wide or narrow, how can he regulate the constraints?"⁹⁶

Li Ching said: "The ordinary general is rarely able to know what constraints are. 'The strategic configuration of power [*shih*] of those that excel in warfare is sharply focused, their constraints are precise. Their strategic power is like a fully drawn crossbow, their constraints like the release of the trigger.'⁹⁷ I have practiced these methods. Thus the standing infantry platoons are ten paces apart from each other, the holding platoons [of chariots] twenty paces from the main army [of infantry]. Between each platoon one combat platoon is emplaced. When advancing forward, fifty paces is one measure.⁹⁸ At the first blowing of the horn all the platoons disperse and assume their positions, not exceeding ten paces apart. At the fourth blowing they position their spears and squat down. Thereupon the drum is beaten, three strikes to three shouts,⁹⁹ and they advance thirty to fifty paces [each time] in order to control the changes of the enemy. The cavalry comes forth from the rear, also advancing fifty paces at a time. The front is orthodox, the rear unorthodox.¹⁰⁰ Observe the enemy's response, then beat the drum again, with the front [changing to be] unorthodox and the rear orthodox."

Again entice the enemy to come forth, discover his fissures, and attack his vacuities. The Six Flowers Formation is generally like this.”

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The T'ai-tsung said: “Duke Ts'ao's *Hsin shu* states: ‘When you deploy your formation opposite the enemy, you must first establish the pennants, drawing the troops into formation according to the pennants. When one brigade comes under attack, any other brigade that does not advance to rescue them will be beheaded.’¹⁰¹ What tactic is this?”

Li Ching said: “Approaching the enemy and then establishing the pennants is incorrect. This is a method applicable only when you are training men in the tactics of warfare. The ancients who excelled at warfare taught the orthodox, they did not teach the unorthodox. They drove the masses just as if driving a herd of sheep. The masses advanced with them, withdrew with them, but they did not know where they were going.¹⁰² Duke Ts'ao was arrogant and loved being victorious. Contemporary generals have all followed the *Hsin shu* without anyone daring to attack its shortcomings. Moreover, if you set up pennants when about to engage the enemy, is it not too late?

“I secretly observed the music and dance you created called ‘Destroying the Formations.’ At the front they put out four pennants, to the rear deployed eight flags. Left and right circled about, marching and racing to the gongs and drums, each in accord with its constraints.¹⁰³ This then is the Eight Formations Diagram, the system of four heads and eight tails. The people only see the flourishing of the music and dance; how can they know that military actions are like this?”

The T'ai-tsung said: “In antiquity, when Emperor Kao of the Han settled the realm, he wrote a song that went ‘Where can I get fierce warriors to guard the four quarters?’ Probably, military strategy can be transmitted as ideas but cannot be handed down as words. I created the Destruction of the Formations, but only you understand its form and substance. Will later generations realize I did not carelessly concoct it?”

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The T'ai-tsung asked: “Are the five flags in their different colors for the five directions for orthodox [forces]?¹⁰⁴ Are the pennants and banners for penetrating the enemy for unorthodox [forces]? Dispersing and reforming are changes; how does one realize the appropriate number of platoons?”

Li Ching said: “I have examined and employ the methods of old. In general, when three platoons combine, their flags lean toward each other but are

not crossed.¹⁰⁵ When five platoons are combined, then the flags of two of them are crossed. When ten platoons are combined, then the flags of five of them are crossed. When the horn is blown, then the five crossed flags are separated, and the combined unit will again disperse to form ten [platoons]. When two crossed flags are separated, the single unit will again disperse to form five [platoons]. When the two flags leaning toward each other, but uncrossed, are separated, the single unit will again disperse to form three [platoons].

“When the soldiers are dispersed, uniting them is unorthodox; when they are united, dispersing them is unorthodox. Give the orders three times, explain them five times. Have them disperse three times, have them reform three times. Then have them reform the orthodox configuration, after which the ‘four heads and eight tails’ can be taught to them. This is what is appropriate to the [training] method for the platoons.”

The T'ai-tsung lauded his discussion.

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The T'ai-tsung said: “Duke Ts'ao had fighting cavalry, attack cavalry, and roving cavalry. What elements of our contemporary cavalry and army are comparable to these?”

Li Ching said: “According to the *Hsin shu*: ‘Fighting cavalry occupy the front, attack cavalry occupy the middle, and roving cavalry occupy the rear.’ If so, then each of them was established with a name and designation, so they were divided into three types. Generally speaking, eight cavalymen were equivalent to twenty-four infantrymen accompanying chariots. Twenty-four cavalymen were equivalent to seventy-two infantrymen accompanying chariots. This was the ancient system.

“The infantrymen accompanying the chariots were normally taught orthodox methods; cavalymen were taught unorthodox ones. According to Duke Ts'ao, the cavalry in the front, rear, and middle are divided into three covering¹⁰⁶ forces, but he did not speak about the two wings, so he was only discussing one aspect of the tactics. Later generations have not understood the intent of the three covering forces, so [they assume] fighting cavalry must be placed in front of the attack cavalry; how then is the roving cavalry employed? I am quite familiar with these tactics. If you turn the formation about, then the roving cavalry occupy the fore, the fighting cavalry the rear, and the attack cavalry respond to the changes of the moment to split off. These are all Duke Ts'ao's methods.”

The T'ai-tsung laughed and said: “How many people have been deluded by Ts'ao Ts'ao?”¹⁰⁷

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Chariots, infantrymen, and cavalry—these three have one method. Does their employment lie with man?"

Li Ching said: "According to the Yü-li formation recorded in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*: 'First the battalions [of chariots], afterward the squads of five [in the gaps].' Then in this case they had chariots and infantrymen but no cavalry. When it refers to the left and right [flanks] resisting, it is speaking about resisting and defending, that is all! They did not employ any unorthodox strategy to attain victory.

"When Hsün Wu of Chin attacked the Ti [barbarian tribes], he abandoned the chariot and had [their personnel] form rows [as infantrymen].¹⁰⁸ In this case numerous cavalry would have been advantageous. He only concentrated on employing unorthodox forces to gain the victory, and was simply not concerned with resisting and defending.

"I have weighed their methods: In general,¹⁰⁹ one cavalryman is equivalent to three infantrymen; chariots and infantrymen are similarly matched. When intermixed they are [governed] by a single method; their employment lies with men. How can the enemy know where my chariots will really go forth? Where my cavalry will really come from? Where the infantrymen will follow up [the attack]? 'Hidden in the greatest depths of Earth, moving from the greatest heights of Heaven,¹¹⁰ his knowledge is spirit-like!' This saying only refers to you, your Majesty. How can I be capable of such knowledge?"

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The T'ai-tsung said: "T'ai Kung's book states: 'On an area of terrain six hundred paces square or sixty paces square, set out the pennants for the twelve constellations of the zodiac.'¹¹¹ What sort of tactic is this?"

Li Ching said: "Demarcate a perimeter of one thousand two hundred paces, total, in a square. Each section [within it] will occupy a square of [one] hundred¹¹² paces on edge. Every five paces horizontally, station a man, every four paces vertically, station a man. Now two thousand five hundred men will be distributed over five occupied areas with four empty ones [remaining]. This is what is meant by a 'formation containing a formation.' When King Wu attacked King Chou, each Tiger Guard commanded three thousand men.¹¹³ Each formation had six thousand men, altogether a mass of thirty thousand. This was the T'ai Kung's method for delineating the terrain [see Figure 2]."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "How do you delineate the terrain for your Six Flower Formation?"

Li Ching said: "Large-scale maneuvers are as follows. On an area twelve hundred paces square there are six formations deployed, each occupying an area with four hundred paces [on edge]. Overall it is divided into two boxes, east and west, with an open area in the middle, one thousand two hundred paces long, for training in warfare [see Figure 3]. I once taught thirty thousand men, with each formation consisting of five thousand. One encamped; five [practiced] the square, round, curved, straight, and angular dispositions. Each formation went through all five changes, for a total of twenty-five, before we stopped."¹¹⁴

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The T'ai-tsung said: "What are the Five Phase formations?"

Li Ching said: "They originally established this name from the colors of the five quarters, but in reality they are all derived from the shape of the terrain—the square, round, curved, straight, and angular. In general, if the army does not constantly practice these five during peacetime, how can they approach the enemy? 'Deception is the Way [Tao] of warfare,'¹¹⁵ so they resorted to naming them the Five Phases. They described them according to the ideas of the School of Techniques and Numbers about the patterns of mutual production and conquest.¹¹⁶ But in actuality the army's form is like water which controls its flow in accord with the terrain.¹¹⁷ This is the main point."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Li Chi spoke about male and female, square and circular tactics for ambush. Did they exist in antiquity or not?"

Li Ching said: "The male and female methods come out of the popular tradition. In actuality they refer to yin and yang, that is all. According to Fan Li's book:¹¹⁸ 'If you are last then use yin tactics, if you are first then use yang tactics.'¹¹⁹ When you have exhausted the enemy's yang measures, then expand your yin to the full and seize them.' This then is the subtle mysteriousness of yin and yang according to the strategists.

"Fan Li also said: 'Establish the right as the female, increase the left to be male. At dawn and dusk accord with the Tao of Heaven.' Thus left and right, dawn and dusk are different according to the time. They lie in the changes of the unorthodox and orthodox. Left and right are the yin and yang in man, dawn and dusk are the yin and yang of Heaven. The unorthodox and orthodox are the mutual changes of yin and yang in Heaven and man. If one

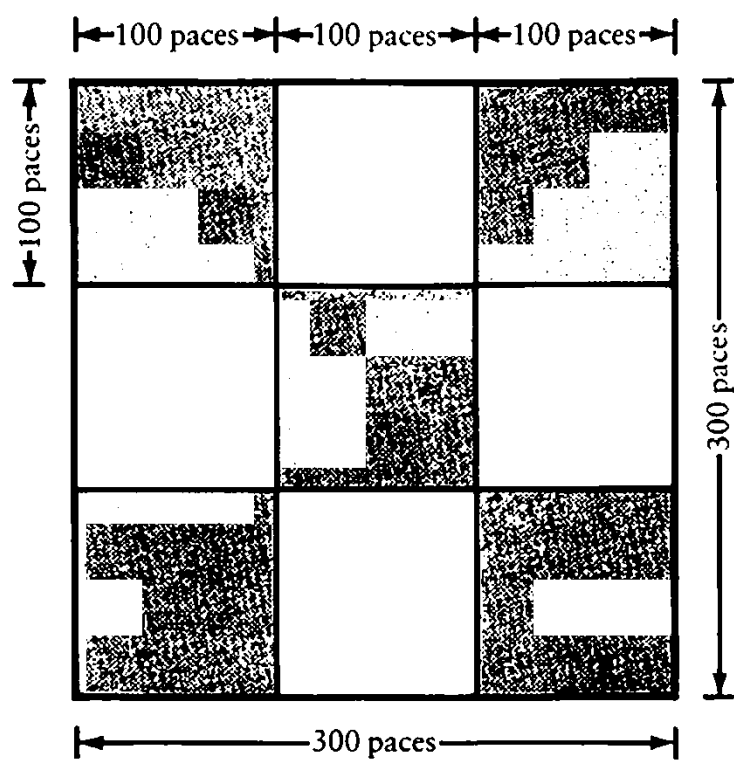


Figure 2 T'ai Kung's training array. Each sub-array (shaded areas within main array) consists of 20 men per row, 5 paces apart, and 25 men per file, 4 paces apart.

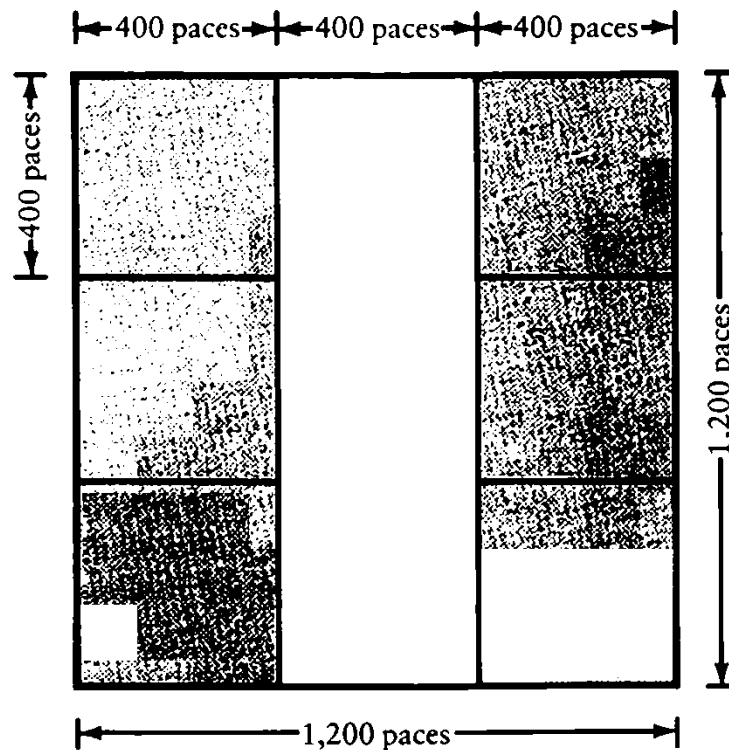


Figure 3 Li Ching's Six Flowers formation. Six formations (shaded areas) are deployed, each numbering 5,000 men. Center area is employed for drilling.

wished to grasp them and not change, then yin and yang would both deteriorate. How can one preserve only the shape of the male and female? Thus when you display an appearance to an enemy, show the unorthodox, not our orthodox. When you conquer, employ the orthodox to attack the enemy, not our unorthodox. This is what is meant by the 'orthodox and unorthodox changing into each other.'

"An 'army in ambush' does not only mean forces lying in ambush in the mountains, valleys, grass, and trees, for hiding them away is the means to [effect an] ambush. Our orthodox should be like the mountain, our unorthodox like thunder. Even though the enemy is directly opposite our front, no one can fathom where our unorthodox and orthodox forces are. At this point what shape do I have?"

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The T'ai-tsung said: "The four animal formations also have the notes *shang*, *yü*, *wei*, and *chiao* to symbolize them. What is the reason for this?"

Li Ching said: "It is the Way [Tao] of deceit."

The T'ai-tsung said: "Can they be dispensed with?"

Li Ching said: "By preserving them one is able to dispense with them. If you dispense with them and do not employ them, deceitfulness will [grow] ever greater."

The T'ai-tsung said: "What do you mean?"

Li Ching said: "They obscured the names of the four formations [by appending] those of the four animals together with the designations of Heaven, Earth, wind, and clouds, and moreover added the notes and associated phases of *shang* and metal, *yü* and water, *wei* and fire, *chiao* and wood.¹²⁰ This was the cleverness of the ancient military strategists. If you preserve them, deceitfulness will not increase further. If you abandon them, how can the greedy and stupid be employed?"

The T'ai-tsung said: "My lord should preserve this in secrecy, not let it be leaked outside."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Severe punishments and imposing laws make men fear me and not fear the enemy.¹²¹ I am very confused about this. In antiquity the Han Emperor Kuang Wu opposed Wang Mang's mass of a million with his solitary force, but he did not use punishments and laws to approach [the people]. So how did [his victory] come about?"

Li Ching said: "An army's victory or defeat is a question of the situation and a myriad factors, and cannot be decided by one element alone. In the case of Ch'en Sheng and Kuang Wu defeating the Ch'in army, could they

have had more severe punishments and laws than the Ch'in? Emperor Kuang Wu's rise was probably due to his according with the people's hatred for Wang Mang. Moreover, Wang Hsün and Wang I did not understand military strategy and merely boasted of their army's masses. Thus in this way they defeated themselves.¹²²

"According to Sun-tzu: 'If you impose punishments on the troops before they have become [emotionally] attached, they will not be submissive. If you do not impose punishments after the troops have become [emotionally] attached, they cannot be used.'¹²³ This means that normally, a general should first bind the soldiers' affection to him, and only thereafter employ severe punishments. If their affection has not yet been developed, few would be able to conquer and be successful solely by employing severe laws."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "In the *Shang shu* it says: 'When awesomeness exceeds love, affairs will be successful. When love exceeds awesomeness, there will be no achievement.'¹²⁴ What does this mean?"

Li Ching said: "Love should be established first, and awesomeness afterward—it cannot be opposite this. If awesomeness is applied first and love supplements it afterward, it will be of no advantage to the prosecution of affairs. The *Shang shu* was extremely careful about the end, but this is not the way plans should be made in the beginning. Thus Sun-tzu's method cannot be eliminated for ten thousand generations."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "When you pacified Hsiao Hsien, our generals wanted to appropriate the households of the traitorous officials in order to reward their own officers and troops. Only you did not concur because K'uai T'ung had not been executed by Han Kao-tsu. The regions of the Chiang and Han rivers all submitted to you.¹²⁵ From this I recall the ancients had a saying: 'The civil is able to attract and attach the masses, the martial is able to overawe the enemy.' Does this not refer to you, my lord?"

Li Ching said: "When Emperor Kuang Wu of the Han pacified the Red Eyebrows,¹²⁶ he entered the rebel encampment for a tour of inspection. The rebels said: 'King Hsiao [Emperor Kuang Wu] extends his own pure heart in sympathy unto others.' This was probably due to [the king] having previously evaluated their motives and emotions as basically not being evil. Did he not have foresight?"

"When I rectified the T'u-chüeh, commanding the combined troops of both Han and barbarians, even though we went outside the pass a thousand *li*, I never killed a single Yang Kan nor beheaded a Chung Chia.¹²⁷ This, too,

was [a case of] extending my innate compassionate sincerity and preserving the common good, that is all! What your Majesty has heard is excessive, putting me into an unrivaled position. If it is a question of combining both the civil and martial, how would I presume to have [such ability]?”

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The T'ai-tsung said: “Formerly, when T'ang Chien was an emissary to the T'u-chüeh, you availed yourself [of the situation] to attack and defeat them. People say you used T'ang Chien as an ‘expendable spy.’¹²⁸ Up until now I have had doubts about this. What about it?”

Li Ching bowed twice and said: “T'ang Chien and I equally served your Majesty. I anticipated that T'ang Chien's proposals would certainly not be able [to persuade them] to quietly submit. Therefore, I took the opportunity to follow up with our army and attack them. In order to eliminate a great danger I did not concern myself with a minor righteousness. Although people refer to T'ang Chien as an expendable spy, it was not my intention.

“According to Sun-tzu, employing spies is an inferior measure. I once prepared a discussion [of this subject] and at the end stated: ‘Water can float a boat, but it can also overturn the boat. Some use spies to be successful; others, relying on spies, are overturned and defeated.’

“If one braids his hair and serves the ruler, maintains a proper countenance in court, is loyal and pure, trustworthy and completely sincere—even if someone excels at spying, how can he be employed [to sow discord]? T'ang Chien is a minor matter. What doubts does your Majesty have?”

The T'ai-tsung said: “Truly, ‘without benevolence and righteousness one cannot employ spies.’¹²⁹ How can the ordinary man do it? If the Duke of Chou, with his great righteousness, exterminated his relatives,¹³⁰ how much the more so one emissary? Clearly, there is nothing to doubt.”

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The T'ai-tsung said: “The army values being the ‘host’; it does not value being a ‘guest.’¹³¹ It values speed, not duration.¹³² Why?”

Li Ching said: “The army is employed only when there is no alternative,¹³³ so what advantage is there in being a ‘guest’ or fighting long? Sun-tzu says: ‘When provisions are transported far off, the common people are impoverished.’¹³⁴ This is the exhaustion of a ‘guest.’ He also said: ‘The people should not be conscripted twice, provisions should not be transported thrice.’¹³⁵ This [comes from] the experience of not being able to long endure. When I compare and weigh the strategic power [*shih*] of host and guest, then there are tactics for changing the guest to host, changing the host to guest.”

The T'ai-tsung said: "What do you mean?"

Li Ching said: "By foraging and capturing provisions from the enemy,¹³⁶ you change a guest into a host. 'If you can cause the sated to be famished and the rested to be tired,'¹³⁷ it will change a host into a guest. Thus the army is not confined to being host or guest, slow or fast, but only focuses on its movements invariably attaining the constraints¹³⁸ and thereby being appropriate."

The T'ai-tsung said: "Were there such cases among the ancients?"

Li Ching said: "In antiquity, Yüeh attacked Wu with two armies—one to the left, the other to the right. When they blew the horns and beat the drums to advance, Wu divided its troops to oppose them. Then Yüeh had its central army secretly ford the river. Without sounding their drums, they suddenly attacked and defeated Wu's army. This is a case of changing a guest into a host.

"When Shih Le did battle with Chi Chan,¹³⁹ Chan's army came from a distance. Shih Le dispatched K'ung Ch'ang to act as an advance front and counterattack Chan's forces. K'ung Ch'ang withdrew, and Chan advanced to pursue him. Shih Le then employed his concealed forces to ambush him from both sides. Chan's army was badly defeated. This is an instance of changing the tired to the rested. The ancients had many cases like this."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Were the iron caltrops and *chevaux-de-frise* created by the T'ai Kung?"

Li Ching said: "They were. But they were for resisting the enemy, that is all! The army values compelling men and does not want to resist them. In the *Six Secret Teachings* the T'ai Kung discusses equipment for defending and repelling, not what would be used in offensives."

BOOK III

The T'ai-tsung said: "The T'ai Kung has stated: 'When infantrymen engage chariots and cavalry in battle, they must take advantage of hillocks, funeral mounds, ravines, and defiles.'¹⁴⁰ Moreover, Sun-tzu said: 'Terrain that looks like fissures in the Heavens, hillocks, funeral mounds, and old fortifications should not be occupied by the army.'¹⁴¹ What about this [contradiction]?"

Li Ching said: "The successful employment of the masses lies in their being of one mind. Unification of mind lies in prohibiting omens and dispelling doubts. Should the commanding general have anything about which he is doubtful or fearful, their emotions will waver. When their emotions waver, the enemy will take advantage of the chink to attack. Thus when securing an encampment or occupying terrain, it should be convenient to human affairs, that is all! Terrain such as precipitous gorges, deep canyons, ravines, and passes with high sides, natural prisons, and heavily overgrown areas are not suitable for human activity. Thus military strategists avoid leading troops into them to prevent the enemy from gaining an advantage over us. Hillocks, funeral mounds, and old fortifications are not isolated terrain or places of danger. If we gain them it will be advantageous, so how would it be appropriate to turn around and abandon them? What the T'ai Kung discussed is the very essence of military affairs."

The T'ai-tsung said: "I think that among implements of violence, none is more terrible than the army.¹⁴² If mobilizing the army is advantageous to human affairs, how can one—for the sake of avoiding evil omens—be doubtful? If in the future any of the generals fails to take appropriate action because of yin and yang or other baleful indications, my lord should repeatedly upbraid and instruct them."

Li Ching bowed twice in acknowledgment, saying: "I recall the *Wei Liao-tzu* states: 'The Yellow Emperor preserved them with Virtue but attacked [the evil] with punishments. This refers to [actual] punishment and Virtue, not the selection and use of astrologically auspicious seasons and days.'¹⁴³

Accordingly, through the 'Tao of deceit' [the masses] should be made to follow them but should not be allowed to know this.¹⁴⁴ In later ages ordinary generals have been mired in mystical techniques and for this reason have frequently suffered defeat. You cannot but admonish them. Your Majesty's sagely instructions should be disseminated to all the generals."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "When the army divides and reassembles, in each case it is important that the actions be appropriate. Among the records of earlier ages, who excelled at this?"

Li Ching said: "Fu Chien commanded a mass of a million and was defeated at Fei River.¹⁴⁵ This is what results when an army is able to unite but cannot divide. When Wu Han conducted a campaign of rectification against Kung-sun Shu, he split his forces with Lieutenant General Liu Shang, encamping about twenty *li* apart.¹⁴⁶ Kung-sun Shu came forward and attacked Wu Han, whereupon Liu Shang advanced to unite with Wu Han in a counterattack, severely defeating Kung-sun Shu. This is the result that can be attained when an army divides and can reassemble. The T'ai Kung said: '[A force] which wants to divide but cannot is an entangled army; one which wants to reassemble but cannot is a solitary regiment.'¹⁴⁷

The T'ai-tsung said: "Yes. When Fu Chien first obtained Wang Meng,¹⁴⁸ he truly knew how to employ the army and subsequently took the central plain. When Wang Meng died, Fu Chien was decisively defeated, so is this what is meant by an 'entangled army'? When Wu Han was appointed by Emperor Kuang Wu, the army was not controlled from a distance, and the Han were able to pacify the Shu area. Does this not indicate that the army did not fall into the difficulty of what is referred to as being a 'solitary regiment'? The historical records of gains and losses are sufficient to be a mirror for ten thousand generations."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "I observe that the thousand chapters and ten thousand sentences [of the military teachings] do not go beyond 'Use many methods to cause them to make errors,'¹⁴⁹ this single statement."

After a long while Li Ching said: "Truly, it is as you have wisely said. In ordinary situations involving the use of the military, if the enemy does not make an error in judgment, how can our army conquer them? It may be compared with chess where the two enemies [begin] equal in strength. As soon as someone makes a mistake, truly no one can rescue him. For this rea-

son, in both ancient and modern times, victory and defeat have proceeded from a single error, so how much more would this be the case with many mistakes?”

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Are the two affairs of attacking and defending in reality one method? Sun-tzu said: 'When one excels at attacking, the enemy does not know where to mount his defense. When one excels at defense, the enemy does not know where to attack.'¹⁵⁰ He did not speak about the enemy coming forth to attack me and me also attacking the enemy. If we assume a defensive posture and the enemy also takes up a defensive position, if in attacking and defense our strengths are equal, what tactic should be employed?"

Li Ching said: "Cases such as this of mutual attack and mutual defense were, in previous ages, numerous. They all said: 'One defends when strength is insufficient, one attacks when strength is more than sufficient.'¹⁵¹ Thus they referred to insufficiency as being weakness and having an excess as strength. Apparently, they did not understand the methods for attack and defense. I recall Sun-tzu said: 'One who cannot be victorious assumes a defensive posture; one who can be victorious attacks.'¹⁵² This indicates that when the enemy cannot yet be conquered, I must temporarily defend myself. When we have waited until the point when the enemy can be conquered, then we attack him. It is not a statement about strength and weakness. Later generations did not understand his meaning, so when they should attack they defend, and when they should defend they attack. The two stages are distinct, so the method cannot be a single one."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "I can see that the concepts of surplus and insufficiency caused later generations to be confused about strength and weakness. They probably did not know that the essence of defensive strategy is to show the enemy an inadequacy. The essence of aggressive strategy lies in showing the enemy that you have a surplus. If you show the enemy an insufficiency, then they will certainly advance and attack. In this case 'the enemy does not know where to attack.'¹⁵³ If you show the enemy a surplus, then they will certainly take up defensive positions. In this case 'the enemy does not know where to mount his defense.'¹⁵⁴ Attacking and defending are one method, but the enemy and I divide it into two matters. If I succeed in this matter, the enemy's affairs will be defeated. If the enemy is successful, then my aims will be defeated. Gaining and losing, success or failure—our aims and the ene-

my's are at odds, but attacking and defending are one! If you understand that they are one, then in a hundred battles you will be victorious a hundred times. Thus it is said: 'If you know yourself and you know the enemy, in a hundred battles you will not be endangered.'¹⁵⁵ This refers to the knowledge of this unity, does it not?"

Li Ching bowed twice and said: "Perfect indeed are the Sage's methods! Attacking is the pivotal point of defense, defending is the strategy for attack. They are both directed toward victory, that is all! If in attacking you do not understand defending, and in defending you do not understand attacking, but instead not only make them into two separate affairs, but also assign responsibility for them to separate offices, then even though the mouth recites the words of Sun-tzu and Wu-tzu, the mind has not thought about the mysterious subtleties of the discussion of the equality of attack and defense. How can the reality then be known?"

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The T'ai-tsung said: "The *Ssu-ma Fa* states that 'even though a state may be vast, those who love warfare will inevitably perish' and that 'even though calm may prevail under Heaven, those who forget warfare will inevitably be endangered.'¹⁵⁶ Is this also one of the ways of attacking and defending?"

Li Ching said: "If one has a state and family, how could he not discuss attacking and defending? For attacking does not stop with just attacking their cities or attacking their formations. One must have techniques for attacking their minds. Defense does not end with just the completion of the walls and the realization of solid formations. One must also preserve spirit and be prepared to await the enemy. To speak of it in the largest terms, it means the Tao of rulership. To speak of it in smaller terms, it means the methods of the general. Now attacking their minds is what is referred to as 'knowing them.' Preserving one's *ch'i* [spirit] is what is meant by 'knowing yourself.'"

The T'ai-tsung said: "True! When I was about to engage in battle, I first evaluated the enemy's mind by comparing it with my mind to determine who was more thoroughly prepared. Only after that could I know his situation. To evaluate the enemy's *ch'i* I compared it with our own to determine who was more controlled. Only then could I know myself. For this reason, 'know them and know yourself' is the great essence of the military strategists. Contemporary generals, even if they do not know the enemy, ought to be able to know themselves, so how could they lose the advantage?"

Li Ching said: "What Sun-tzu meant by 'first make yourself unconquerable'¹⁵⁷ is 'know yourself.' 'Waiting until the enemy can be conquered'¹⁵⁸ is 'knowing them.' Moreover, he said that 'being unconquerable lies with your-

self, while being conquerable lies with the enemy.¹⁵⁹ I have not dared to neglect this admonition even for a moment.”

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Sun-tzu spoke about strategies by which the *ch'i* of the Three Armies may be snatched away: 'In the morning their *ch'i* is ardent; during the day their *ch'i* becomes indolent; and at dusk their *ch'i* is exhausted. One who excels at employing the army avoids their ardent *ch'i* and strikes when it is indolent or exhausted.'¹⁶⁰ How is this?"

Li Ching said: "Whoever has life and a natural endowment of blood, if they die without a second thought when the drums are sounded to do battle, it is the *ch'i* which causes it to be so. Thus methods for employing the army require first investigating our own officers and troops, stimulating our *ch'i* for victory, and only then attacking the enemy. Among Wu Ch'i's four vital points, the vital point of *ch'i* is foremost.¹⁶¹ There is no other Tao. If one can cause his men themselves to want to fight, then no one will be able to oppose their ardor. What [Sun-tzu] meant by the *ch'i* being ardent in the morning is not limited to those hours alone. He used the beginning and end of the day as an analogy. In general, if the drum has been sounded three times but the enemy's *ch'i* has neither declined nor become depleted, then how can you cause it to invariably become indolent or exhausted? Probably, those who study the text merely recite the empty words and are misled by the enemy. If one could enlighten them with the principles for snatching away the *ch'i*, the army could be entrusted to them."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "You once said that General Li Chi¹⁶² is capable in military strategy, but can he be employed indefinitely or not? If I am no longer around to control and direct him, [I fear] he cannot be used. In the future, how should the heir apparent direct him?"

Li Ching said: "If I were to plan on behalf of your Majesty, nothing would be better than [for you] to dismiss Li Chi and have the heir apparent reemploy him. Then he would certainly feel grateful and think how to repay him. In principle, is there any harm in this?"¹⁶³

The T'ai-tsung said: "Excellent. I have no doubts about it."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "If I order Li Shih-chi and Chang-sun Wu-chi¹⁶⁴ to take the reigns of government together, what do you think?"

Li Ching said: “[Li] Chi is loyal and righteous. I can guarantee that he will uphold his duties. [Chang-sun] Wu-chi followed your commands and made great contributions. Because he is a relative, your Majesty has entrusted him with the office of Deputy Minister. But while in external demeanor he is deferential to other officials, within he is actually jealous of the Worthy. Thus Yü-chih Ching-te¹⁶⁵ pointed out his shortcomings to his face and then retired. Hou Chün-chi hated him for forgetting old [friends], and as a result he revolted and turned against you.¹⁶⁶ These were both brought about by Wu-chi. Since you questioned me about this, I did not dare avoid discussing it.”

The T'ai-tsung said: “Do not let it leak out. I will ponder how to settle it.”

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The T'ai-tsung said: “Emperor Han Kao-tsu was able to command his generals, but later on Han Hsin and P'eng Yüeh were executed, and Hsiao Ho was imprisoned.¹⁶⁷ What is the reason for this?”

Li Ching said: “I observe that neither Liu Pang nor Hsiang Yü were rulers capable of commanding generals.¹⁶⁸ At the time of Ch'in's collapse, Chang Liang originally wanted to gain revenge for his [old state of] Han, while Ch'en P'ing and Han Hsin both resented Hsiang Yü's failure to employ them.¹⁶⁹ Therefore they availed themselves of Han's strategic power. Hsiao Ho, Ts'ao Ts'an, Fan K'uai, and Kuan Ying were all fleeing for their lives.¹⁷⁰ Han Kao-tsu gained All under Heaven through relying upon them. If he had caused the descendants of the Six States to be reestablished, all the people would have embraced their old states.¹⁷¹ Then even if he had the ability to command generals, who could the Han have employed? I have said that the Han gained the realm through Chang Liang borrowing [Kao-tsu's] chopsticks and Hsiao Ho's achievements in managing water transportation. From this standpoint, Han Hsin and P'eng Yüeh being executed and Fan Tseng not being used [by Hsiang Yü] are the same.¹⁷² I therefore refer to Liu Pang and Hsiang Yü as rulers incapable of commanding generals.”

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The T'ai-tsung said: “The Later Han Emperor Kuang-wu, who restored the dynasty, was thereafter able to preserve complete his meritorious generals and did not entrust them with civil affairs. Is this being good at commanding generals?”

Li Ching said: “Although Emperor Kuang-wu availed himself of the glories of the Former Han and easily attained success, still Wang Mang's strate-

gic power was not inferior to Hsiang Yü's, while [his generals] K'ou Hsün and Teng Yü¹⁷³ never surpassed Hsiao Ho and Ts'ao Ts'an. He alone was able to extend his pure heart, employ a genial administration, and preserve complete his virtuous subjects, so he was far more worthy than Han Kao-tsu. Based on this, if we discuss being able to command generals, then I would say that Emperor Kuang-wu attained it."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "In ancient times when they dispatched the army and appointed the commanding general, [the ruler] would ritually prepare by observing a vegetarian regime for three days. He would then hand a *yüeh* ax to the general, saying: 'From this to Heaven above will be controlled by the General of the Army.' Moreover, he would give him a *fu* ax, saying: 'From this to Earth below will be controlled by the General of the Army.'¹⁷⁴ Then he would push the hub [on the general's chariot]¹⁷⁵ and say: 'Advancing and withdrawing should only be timely. When you are already on the march, those in the army will only obey the general's orders, not the ruler's commands.' I note that these rites have long been neglected. Today I would like to establish a ceremony with my lord for commissioning and sending off the general. What about it?"

Li Ching said: "I dare to say that the Sages created this ceremony together with the vegetarian fast at the ancestral temple in order to borrow awesomeness and spirituality from the spirits. Granting the *yüeh* and *fu* axes together with pushing the hub were the means by which they entrusted them with authority. Today, whenever your Majesty is about to dispatch the army, you invariably hold deliberations and discussions with your high officials, announce it at the temple, and afterward dispatch them. This, then, is inviting the spirits to come forth. Whenever you have appointed a general, you have always ordered him to manage affairs as circumstances may dictate. This, then, is loaning him great authority. How does it differ from observing a vegetarian fast and pushing the hub? It completely harmonizes with the ancient ceremony, its meaning is identical. It is not necessary to consult together to decide [a new one]."

The ruler said "Excellent" and then ordered the nearby officials to record these two practices as a model for later ages.

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The T'ai-tsung said: "Can the [divinatory] practices of yin and yang¹⁷⁶ be abandoned?"

Li Ching said: "They cannot. The military is the Tao of deceit, so if we [apparently] put faith in yin and yang divinatory practices, we can manipulate the greedy and stupid. They cannot be abandoned."

The T'ai-tsung said: "You once said that selecting astrologically auspicious seasons and days are not methods of enlightened generals. Ignorant generals adhere to them, so it seems appropriate to abandon them."

Li Ching said: "King Chou perished on a day designated as *chai-tzu*; King Wu flourished on the same day. According to the astrologically auspicious seasons and days, *chia-tzu* is the first day. The Shang were in chaos, the Chou were well governed. Flourishing and perishing are different in this case. Moreover, Emperor Wu of the Sung mobilized his troops on a 'going to perish day.'¹⁷⁷ The army's officers all felt it to be impermissible, but the emperor said: 'I will go forth and he will perish.' Indeed, he conquered them. Speaking with reference to these cases, it is clear that the practices can be abandoned. However, when T'ien Tan was surrounded by Yen, Tan ordered a man to impersonate a spirit. He bowed and prayed to him, and the spirit said Yen could be destroyed. Tan thereupon used fire oxen to go forth and attack Yen, greatly destroying them.¹⁷⁸ This is the deceitful Tao of military thinkers. The selection of astrologically auspicious seasons and days is similar to this."

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The T'ai-tsung said: "T'ien Tan entrusted their fate to the supernatural and destroyed Yen, while the T'ai Kung burned the milfoil and tortoise shells yet went on to exterminate King Chou. How is it that these two affairs are contradictory?"

Li Ching said: "Their subtle motives were the same. One went contrary [to the practices] and seized [the enemy], one accorded with them and implemented [his plans].¹⁷⁹

"In antiquity, when the T'ai Kung was assisting King Wu, they reached Mu-yeh where they encountered thunder and rain. The flags and drums were broken or destroyed. San I-sheng wanted to divine for an auspicious response before moving. This, then, is a case where because of doubts and fear within the army, he felt they must rely on divination to inquire of the spirits. [But] the T'ai Kung believed that rotted grass and dried-up bones were not worth asking. Moreover, in the case of a subject attacking his ruler, how could there be a second chance? Now I observe that San I-sheng expressed his motives at the beginning, but the T'ai Kung attained his subsequently. Even though one was contrary to and the other in accord with [divinatory

practices], their reasons were identical. When I previously stated these techniques should not be abandoned, it was largely to preserve the vital point of *ch'i* before affairs have begun to manifest themselves.¹⁸⁰ As for their being successful, it was a matter of human effort, that is all!”

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The T'ai-tsung said: “At present there are only three real generals—Li Chi, Li Tao-tsung, and Hsüeh Wan-ch'e. Apart from Li Tao-tsung, a relative, who can undertake great responsibility?”

Li Ching said: “Your Majesty once said that when employing the army, Li Chi and Li Tao-tsung will not achieve great victories, but neither will they suffer disastrous defeats, while if Wan-ch'e does not win a great victory, he will inevitably suffer a serious defeat. In my ignorance I have thought about your Sagely words. An army which does not seek great victory but also does not suffer serious defeat is constrained and disciplined. An army which may achieve great victory or suffer horrendous defeat relies upon good fortune to be successful. Thus Sun Wu said: ‘One who excels at warfare establishes himself in a position where he cannot be defeated while not losing [any opportunity] to defeat the enemy.’¹⁸¹ This says that constraint and discipline lie with us.”

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The T'ai-tsung said: “When two formations approach each other, should we not want to fight, how can we attain it?”

Li Ching said: “In antiquity the Chin army attacked Ch'in,¹⁸² engaged in battle with them, and then withdrew. The *Ssu-ma Fa* states: ‘Do not pursue a fleeing enemy too far nor follow a retreating army too closely.’¹⁸³ I refer to those retreating as being under the control of the reins. If our army already is constrained and disciplined while the enemy's army is also in well-ordered rows and squads, how can [either side] lightly engage in combat? Thus when they [both] go forth, clash, and then withdraw without being pursued, each side is defending against loss and defeat. Sun-tzu said: ‘Do not attack well-regulated formations, do not intercept well-ordered flags.’¹⁸⁴ When two formations embody equal strategic power [*shih*], should one lightly move he may create an opportunity for the enemy to gain the advantage and thereby suffer a great defeat. [Strategic] principles cause it to be thus. For this reason armies encounter situations in which they will not fight and those in which they must fight. Not engaging in battle lies with us; having to fight lies with the enemy.”

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The T'ai-tsung said: "What do you mean 'not engaging in battle lies with us?'"

Li Ching said: "Sun Wu has stated: 'If I do not want to engage in battle, I will draw a line on the ground and defend it. They will not be able to engage us in battle because we thwart their movements.'¹⁸⁵ If the enemy has [capable] men, the interval between the clash and retreat cannot yet be planned. Thus I said that not engaging in battle lies with us. As for having to fight lying with the enemy, Sun Wu has stated: 'One who excels at moving the enemy deploys in a configuration to which the enemy must respond. He offers something which the enemy must seize. With profit he moves them; with his main force he awaits them.'¹⁸⁶ If the enemy lacks talented officers, they will certainly come forth and fight. I then take advantage of the situation to destroy them. Thus I said that having to fight lies with the enemy."

The T'ai-tsung said: "Profound indeed! The constrained and disciplined army—when it realizes appropriate strategies—flourishes, but when it lacks them perishes. My lord, please compile and record the writings of those through the ages who excelled at constraint and discipline, provide diagrams, and submit them to me. I will select the quintessential ones to be transmitted to later ages."

[Li Ching said:¹⁸⁷ "I previously submitted two diagrams of the Yellow Emperor's and T'ai Kung's dispositions together with the *Ssu-ma Fa* and Chu-ko Liang's strategies for the unorthodox and orthodox. They are already highly detailed. Numerous famous historical generals employed one or two of them and achieved success. But official historians have rarely understood military matters, so they were unable to properly record the substance of their achievements. Would I dare not accept your Majesty's order? I will prepare a compilation and narration for you."]

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The T'ai-tsung said: "What is of greatest importance in military strategy?"

Li Ching said: "I once divided it into three levels to allow students to gradually advance into it. The first is termed the Tao, the second Heaven and Earth, and the third Methods of Generalship. As for the Tao, it is the most essential and subtle, what the *I Ching* refers to as 'all-perceiving and all-knowing, [allowing one to be] spiritual and martial without slaying.'¹⁸⁸ Now what is discussed under Heaven is yin and yang; what is discussed under Earth is the narrow and easy. One who excels at employing the army is able to use the yin to snatch the yang, the narrow to attack the easy. It is what Mencius referred to as the 'seasons of Heaven and advantages of Earth.'¹⁸⁹

The Methods of Generalship discusses employing men and making the weapons advantageous—what the *Three Strategies* means by saying that one who gains the right officers will prosper, and the *Kuan-tzu* by saying that the weapons must be solid and sharp.”

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The T'ai-tsung said: “Yes. I have said that an army which can cause men to submit without fighting is the best; one that wins a hundred victories in a hundred battles is mediocre; and one that uses deep moats and high fortifications for its own defense is the lowest. If we use this as a standard for comparison, all three are fully present in Sun-tzu's writings.”

Li Ching said: “We can also distinguish them if we scrutinize their writings and retrace their undertakings. For example, Chang Liang, Fan Li, and Sun Wu abandoned the world to withdraw into lofty isolation. No one knows where they went. If they had not penetrated the Tao, how could they have done it? Yüeh I,¹⁹⁰ Kuan Chung, and Chu-ko Liang were always victorious in battle and solid in defense. If they had not investigated and understood the seasons of Heaven and the advantages of Earth, how could they have succeeded? Next would be Wang Meng's preservation of Ch'in and Hsieh An's defense of Chin.¹⁹¹ If they had not employed [outstanding] generals and selected talented man, repaired and solidified their defenses, how could they have managed? Thus the study of military strategy must be from the lowest to middle and then from the middle to highest, so that they will gradually penetrate the depths of the teaching. If not, they will only be relying on empty words. Merely remembering and reciting them is not enough to succeed.”

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The T'ai-tsung said: “Taoists shun three generations [of a family] serving as generals.¹⁹² [Military teachings] should not be carelessly transmitted, yet should also not be not transmitted. Please pay careful attention to this matter.”

Li Ching bowed twice and went out, and turned all his military books over to Li Chi.